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ABSTRACT

Business and industry have exerted a strong influence on public schools and school administration, especially on assumptions about the school setting and its implications for administrator behavior. Schools have been assumed to be bureaucratic organizations in a stable environment, which implies that administrators should be leaders in establishing goals as well as maintainers and controllers in attaining those goals. However, if the school is assumed to exist in a turbulent "field" or environment--one with complex interdependencies and which is always changing--then school stability cannot be maintained by traditional bureaucratic mechanisms, but rather by developing overriding social values and a matrix of organizational alliances. In the past 60 years schools have in fact existed in a turbulent environment and have become richly connected with many other organizations, both formally and informally. In a turbulent environment, the administrative qualities implied for an organization are those of a preacher, diplomat, and statesman, and school administrators do indeed behave more according to these roles than according to the roles of leaders, maintainers, and controllers. (RW)

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THE TURBULENT FIELD OF PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Dennis A. Conners and Donald B. Reed

Introduction

Many writers consider that business and industry have exerted a powerful influence on the American public schools over the past 60 years. School policy, procedures, and rhetoric seem to reflect this influence. In school districts, the major content of policy deals with financial, budgetary, and accounting practices. Detailed personnel regulations are abundant. A great deal of manual effort is concerned with securing materials and supplies and their distribution. Pupil accounting procedures have their roots in business practices. The language used in public schools mirrors the impact of business and industry on education. The industrial words "raw material" and "product" are frequently used to describe students and the business term "efficiency" has long been associated with public school administration. The current interest in "accountability" clearly had its origins in the business model. Callahan has described in detail the important influence of business on the American public schools in *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*.[1]

The question arises: Why has business and industry apparently been so influential on the public schools? Callahan suggested that the influence of business interests can be traced through educational administrators. School administrators, particularly school superintendents, are located at the interface between the school and the community. Callahan argued that the great prestige business enjoyed, particularly during the first third of the century, was bound to influence school administrators simply by virtue of their organizational position. However, Callahan further suggested that, because public school administrators lacked sufficient training, they were (and likely remain) particularly vulnerable to pressures from the community and organized interest groups, particularly business and industry. Callahan stated:

> If America had had a tradition of graduate training in administration—genuinely educational, intellectual, and scholarly, if not scientific—such a tradition might have served as a brake or restraining force.[2]

Lane[3] and Owens[4] both support Callahan's contention that the influence of business administration on educational administration had been considerable at least until the early fifties. Both authors cited the impact of Taylorism on schools, i.e., the scientific management (1910 to 1930) and human relations movements (1930 to 1950) from business and industry. Owens suggested that from 1910 to at least 1950 the impact of these theories or movements was perpetuated and perhaps reinforced through the quality of training many educational administrators encountered. According to Owens:

> Schools of education in even the most prestigious universities tended to have almost no contact with the business schools and the behavioral science departments on their own campuses. Traditionally, educational administration has been taught by former superintendents of schools whose knowledge of their subject came largely from years of hard-earned experience in the "front lines." Courses of educational administration tended to be focused on practical, "how-to-do-it" problems, drawing on the past experience of practicing administrators. Emphasis was typically given to sharing the techniques of these administrators for solving problems that had been tried in school districts such as the ones that the students were familiar with.[5]

Thus, "front line" administrators were influenced directly by business in their daily work. When the "front line" superintendents became professors, they then passed on the influence of business to their students.

The training of educational administrators remained fundamentally unchanged until the 1950s. The year 1950 marked a milestone for educational administration. This was the year the Cooperative Program in Educational Administration (CPEA) came into existence. The CPEA, frequently called the "Kellogg Project," was a jointly sponsored program composed of the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of County and Rural Superintendents, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the Kellogg Foundation. The Kellogg Foundation supplied the financing for CPEA, and the impact of the project was considerable. Research centers were established at various universities. An eclectic approach employing various theories from social and behavioral science was employed. The era of "ferment" in educational administration had begun, and educational administration appeared to be achieving a status and identity of its own, rather than indirectly through business and industry.

The impact of the "new" educational administration on the public school practitioner is difficult to assess.[6] By 1965 the "ferment" seemed to have quieted considerably, and in 1972 Iannaccone suggested that the impact of the "new" educational admin-

istration was less than anticipated in the fifties. Even with the "ferment" and "new" education administration, the influence of this movement on public school administration has likely been moderate at most. Iannaccone stated, ". . . the rate of change may appear to be glacial."[7]

Thus, it seems fair to assert that the apparent influence of business on school administration continues and that it is likely that Callahan would still describe American public school administration as being in a position of "pathetic vulnerability," in an "anti-intellectual climate," "moved with the tide" of business pressures, and lacking "a tradition of genuinely educational, intellectual and scholarly, if not scientific . . ." graduate training.[8]

After analyzing the school-business relationship, Callahan seems to have made several assumptions when suggesting that better training of educational administrators would likely have an impact on public schools in reducing the influence of business and allowing the schools to control their own destiny. He assumed the public school to be a bureaucratic organizational structure with administrative influence (at least with potential administrative influence) as the primary guiding and controlling force. Also, Callahan seemed to assume that the public school organization is inherently stable and that the school administrator need not concern himself with the integrity or stability of the school. Futhermore, he seemed to assume that a well-trained public school administrator would have the capability of strategically planning for the school's future. He also seemed to imply that a collectively well-educated and professionally trained school administration would be able to directly influence the internal operation of the school, defend the school in the presence of the persistent exterior pressures, and lead the school organization in the appropriate direction without having to be concerned about organizational stability. Callahan seemed to make assumptions regarding the organization and setting of public schools, then tacitly constructs an ideal model of a public school administrator which suggested the comparisons to be made between the practicing and the ideal public school administrator.

If, however, Callahan's assumptions regarding the organization and setting of the public school are changed, then the practical and ideal image of the public school administrator changes. A theoretical model of the school and its environment which does not assume a prior organizational stability, a bureaucratic structure, and the administrator's capability for strategic planning will be examined below. The authors argue that the qualities of the setting or environment in which the public school is located have important implications for the school and the qualities of organizational administration.

An Analytic Model

Emery and Trist[9] proposed that the environment in which an organization is located directly affects the relationship of the organization to the environment, the relationship between similar and dissimilar organizations, organizational character, and indirectly the appropriate administrative qualities associated with the organization. These authors identify four distinct types of organizational environments, the last of which seems to describe the setting of the twentieth-century American public school. They identified the four organizational environments as: (1) placid-random, (2) placid-clustered, (3) disturbed-reactive, and (4) turbulent field.

The simplest environmental condition, placid-random, assumes a constant field in that the good and bad qualities of the environment (relative to the organization) are randomly distributed. Strategic planning is impossible for the organization in such environments, because no environmental pattern exists which might guide the organization to specific goals or ends.

A constant field is also assumed in the placid-clustered environment; however, the good and bad qualities of the environment are not randomly distributed but patterned or clustered. In this environment, according to Emery and Trist, "Survival becomes critically linked with what the organization knows of its environment."[10] Strategic planning is possible and becomes necessary for survival. "Organizations under these conditions tend to grow in size and also become hierarchical, with a tendency toward centralized control and coordination."[11] Emery and Trist are describing a bureaucracy. The disturbed-reactive environment is assumed to have the same field qualities as the placid-clustered environment; however, a multiplicity of similar organizations are assumed to be present. Therefore, an organization in a disturbed-reactive environment not only has to deal with the environment, but also with similar organizations. Thus, the growth and survival of one organization is likely to be at the expense of another, unless organizations "come-to-terms with their competitors."[12]

The previous three organizational environments have frequently been discussed by others in the literature, but the concept of the turbulent field was developed solely by Emery and Trist. These authors employed the term "turbulent field" to describe an environment in which the field is ever changing. According to Emery and Trist, in turbulent fields ". . . dynamic processes, which create significant variances for the component organizations, arise from the field itself."[13] Three contributory conditions were cited for the emergence of turbulent fields. These included (1) the growth of interorganization links producing unpredictable environmental changes, (2) the development of dependencies among economic organizations and other societal organizations through legislation and public regulations; and (3) the reliance of organizations on research and development producing a change gradient which is ". . . continuously present in the environmental field."[14]

Emery and Trist seem to have suggested that a turbulent field results when complex interdependencies develop among organizations occupying a common environment. These interdependencies are produced by survival interdependencies and legal interdependencies; that is to say, the products of one organization become the raw material for another. Futhermore, organizational research producing new technologies, as well as new information, is likely to contribute to the turbulent field. In this environment an action by an organization is likely to produce an unpredictable wave effect throughout the rich interorganizational net.

It should be noted that it is not the presence or absence of activity in a field which produces turbulence or the lack of it. If activity is patterned and predictable and not affected by organizational action, then a placid field results. On the other hand, an apparently inactive field can be turbulent if a complex net of organizational interdependencies exist. It is the turbulent field which seems to closely describe the environment of the public school.

The relationship of public education with business and industry over the last 60 years is well accepted. Business and industry support public education, in part, because the public schools produce a literate, compliant work force.[15] Labor unions support public schools for much the same reasons, but with an eye toward upward social mobility for the children of members. A relationship between the public school and a university exists in that the public school appears to perform a training and selection function for universities, while the universities provide a trained staff to operate the schools. These several examples are selected to illustrate that the schools are indeed tightly linked to other organizations all occupying a common environment. Any action by one organization is likely to affect the other organization in unanticipated ways.

Ethnic minority groups in recent years have gained recognition as legitimate organizations by pressing for certain social legislation and making appeals to the courts regarding discriminatory behavior on the part of private and public schools. It is primarily through the courts that the Black population in the United States and the public schools have developed an interdependent relationship. According to Emery and Trist, this type of interdependency, in which one organization is linked to others through legal procedures, will likely produce a turbulent unpredictable quality in the field.

The public schools—indirectly through other research organizations (e.g., university departments of education, psychology, and sociology)—have drawn upon scientific research in an attempt to perform educational tasks more effectively. Research findings can produce two outcomes. First, research is frequently the basis for new ideas and technologies which, when employed by the schools, are likely to add directly to the field turbulence. Secondly, research findings in themselves are likely to cause individuals within the public schools to perceive the field differently. Phenomena which were overlooked or not considered important now take on new meaning. This, in effect, produces turbulence in the field.

These examples are cited to illustrate that the public schools have existed for the last 60 years in a rather turbulent environment. The public schools are richly connected with a myriad of other organizations in United States society. The public schools are not only connected by a number of informal, although important, interdependencies, but also through formal and legal links. This richly connected net produces a turbulent environmental texture for the public schools in which strategic planning becomes almost impossible.

Examining the public schools using the Emery and Trist model produces a picture of an organization which does not have control over its own destiny. Even if there were agreement that public schools should have control over their own destiny, this would likely be impossible as long as they exist in a turbulent environment. Control over an organization's destiny implies the ability to strategically plan in a meaningful way. In a turbulent environment, the unanticipated is to be expected; therefore, strategic planning and organizational control have little meaning in the usual sense of the words.

Thus, it is not to be expected that the public school administrator should lead (set organizational goals), control (set organizational means), and defend the public schools in the way implied by Callahan. In the following section of this paper, the mechanisms used by an organization existing in a turbulent field to achieve organizational stability, goal attainment, and organizational control will be discussed. Particular reference will be made to public schools and implications for educational administrators will be cited.

Implications of the Turbulent Field Model for Public Schools and Public School Administrators

Emery and Trist suggested that organizations existing in a turbulent environment are not inherently stable, and that certain conditions must arise to ensure organizational longevity. If it is assumed public schools exist in a turbulent environment, then the conditions proposed by Emery and Trist will likely be found in public schools.

Emery and Trist suggested the emergence of social values ". . . that have overriding significance for all members of the field" and are capable of transforming a turbulent environment into one which is "simplified and relatively static."[16] These social values can be regarded as a coping mechanism that makes it possible to deal with persisting areas of relative uncertainty.

Dahl suggested much the same notion when he attempted to explain the persistence of the democratic system he described in New Haven.[17] Both Emery and Trist, and Dahl suggest that a turbulent environment achieves a certain degree of stability through the universal acceptance of a set of somewhat vague beliefs. Dahl cited the "American creed" and Emery and Trist cited the "ten commandments" as examples. The individuals in the environment cannot reach consensus on detailed statements of these universal beliefs, but accept, support, and defend the general statements. The environmental field takes on a quality, although not permanently, of placidness and stability; unpredictability and disruption of the environmental field are minimized. Now, internal organizational methods of achieving stability have a higher probability of success.

There appears to be a set of beliefs about public schools similar to those described by Emery and Trist, and Dahl. These beliefs appear to serve the function of unifying a large number of relatively small organizations with the public school; for example, small businesses, churches, local labor unions, and property owners' associations. These unifying beliefs encompass such ideas as "Universal public education is necessary for democracy," "The school should prepare students to be useful citizens," and "Children should be given the opportunity to develop to their highest potential." Schools typically have a variety of such statements incorporated into their formal policies but lack detailed interpretations of these general statements.

Assuming the public school fits the Emery and Trist model, it can be inferred that the school administrator would not engage in activities which would jeopardize or call into question the validity of the unifying beliefs. On the contrary, it would be expected that an administrator would intuitively, or deliberately, engage in activities which would support and reinforce these beliefs. Public school administrators typically have a reputation of speaking in glowing platitudes and of being rather noncommittal in their public statements. Thus, the behavior of public school administrators appears to be consistent with that predicted by the Emery and Trist model.

Emery and Trist argue that dissimilar organizations whose fates are positively correlated and coexisting in a turbulent field will tend to form cooperative relationships. "This means relationships that will maximize cooperation and which recognize that no one organization can take over the role of another become paramount.[18] The formation of this type of relationship among organizations is termed an organizational matrix. The alliance between the public school and business mentioned previously has been severely criticized by Callahan. However, according to the Emery and Trist model, alliances between dissimilar but positively related organizations are to be expected in a turbulent field. It should be expected that educational administrators would seek and nurture alliances between certain dissimilar organizations in an attempt to reduce field turbulence in order to secure stability for the public school organization. In making alliances with other organizations the educational administrator behaves as a promoter and diplomat, using promotion building alliances, as well as diplomacy in maintaining alliances.

Emery and Trist suggest that even though there emerges unifying social values and an organizational matrix develops, strategic objectives and goals must be ". . . formulated in terms of institutionalization." They cite Selznick and assert that ". . . organizations become institutions through the embodiment of organizational values which related them to the wider society."[19] In the case of public schools, it therefore should not be expected that the school would create its own identity and defend it on the public forum as Callahan implies educational administrators should do. On the contrary, it should be expected that public schools would derive their identity in part from the allied, dissimilar organizations and the overriding social values of the field. In an organization such as schools, the strategies and goals do not arise solely from the principal organization's charac-

ter, but must offer also maximum convergence with the interests of other associated organizations. It should be expected that the public school would embody, at least, some of the values of its associated organizations; particularly business and industry, labor unions, universities, and in some locations, agriculture. Critics of public schools have been particularly vociferous on this point, suggesting that the public school should not be influenced by unrelated organizations and groups. Callahan is a case in point.

Selznick states that the organizational administrator ". . . becomes a statesman as he makes the transition from administrative manager to institutional leadership . . ."[20] This is perhaps a key to understanding the behavior of public school administrators. If the administrator is pictured in an organization that occupies a position in a placid or disturbed environment, then it would be expected the school administrator would exhibit the traditional qualities of an administrator, i.e., leading (strategic planning, setting goals), controlling, and maintaining the organization. It is these characteristics that are idealized for public school administrators, but are frequently missing. This is to be expected if one infers from the Emery and Trist model. If, however, the public school is assumed to occupy a turbulent field producing a meta-stable condition for the public school, then the idealized qualities of the public school administrator are quite different from the traditional ones. Since the integrity of the school is likely to be at stake and strategic planning nearly impossible in the usual sense of the word, it is to be expected that the public school administrator would likely assume the roles of preacher, diplomat, and statesman. It seems reasonable to assert that these are the qualities which educational administrators have exhibited over the last 60 years and continue to exhibit. However, it appears that it is these qualities in educational administrators that Callahan condemns in favor of the more traditional ones.

Summary

In this paper it has been argued that certain assumptions regarding the organization and setting of public schools imply a particular ideal model of behavior for the public school administrator. If the public school is assumed to be a bureaucratic organization existing in a placid environment, then the school administrator should possess a particular set of qualities. These include (1) *leading*—the ability to establish organizational goals and strategically plan; and (2) *maintaining and controlling*—the ability to establish the means for reaching the organizational goals consistent with retaining the integrity of the organization.

It has been argued that if the school is assumed to exist in a turbulent field environment, then the stability of the public school becomes questionable and cannot be maintained solely by traditional bureaucratic mechanisms. Furthermore, strategic planning becomes impossible. In a turbulent environment organizational stability is achieved through the development and maintenance of overriding social values and the development of an organizational matrix. Further, stability is secured by institutionalism which occurs through the embodiment of values by the organization of at least some of the values of the allied organizations and the broader community. Organizational goals cannot solely depend upon the character of the organization, but also must be convergent with the interests of allied organizations. The administrative qualities implied for an organization in a turbulent field are argued to be those of a preacher, diplomat, and statesman.

It has been asserted that the American public school does not exist in a placid environment, but in a turbulent field and that administrative behavior should be expected to reflect this condition. Finally, it has been suggested that administrative behavior, in reality, does indeed more closely coincide with the qualities implied by the turbulent field model rather than the placid condition. This is to say, public school administrators behave more as preachers, diplomats, and statesmen rather than leaders, maintainers, and controllers.

FOOTNOTES

1. R. E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).
2. Ibid., p. 245.
3. W. R. Lane, R. G. Corwin, W. G. Monahan, *Foundations of Educational Administration: A Behavioral Analysis* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967).
4. R. G. Owens, *Organizational Behavior in Schools* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1970).
5. Ibid., p. 15.
6. An excellent discussion of the relationship between the scientific or "new" approach to the study of educational administration and its impact on practice can be found in "Can Science Guide the Administrator's Hand? A Critique of the 'New Movement' Ideology in Educational Administration," by Thomas B. Greenfield, a paper presented to the National Graduate Student Research Seminar in Educational Administration, Los Angeles, April, 1981; see also "Research in Educational Administration in the United States and Canada: Critique of a Tradition," *Educational Administration*, 8:1 (Winter, 1980): 207-245.
7. L. Iannaccone, "Interdisciplinary Theory Guided Research in Educational Administration: A Smoggy View from the Valley," *Teachers College Record* 75(1973): 57.
8. R. E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, p. 261.
9. F. E. Emery and E. L. Trist, "The Causal Texture of Organizational Environments," *Human Relations* 18(1965).
10. Ibid, p. 25.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid, p. 26.
14. Ibid.
15. S. Bowles and H. Gintis, *Schooling Capitalist America* (London: Routledge and Kegan-Paul, 1976).
16. Emery and Trist, "The Causal Texture," p. 28.
17. R. A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961).
18. Emery and Trist, "The Causal Texture," p. 29.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.

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